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ABSTRACT

School camping began in the United States in the 1940's and underwent expansion on a grand scale during the 1950's; in 1967, it reached more than one-half million students in over 1000 school districts. The philosophy of early school camps was almost totally activity-centered, with little emphasis on formal curricular subject matter, such as science and math, except where needed to solve problems at hand; however, modern philosophy of school camps emphasizes those activities not normally undertaken in the classroom as well as school subject organization wherein different subject matter areas are dealt with specifically. Since many school districts do not own their own camp sites, a potential method of acquisition of facilities is rental from some other organization or governmental agency. The major justification schools have for offering school camp programs is that these programs offer the potential for experiences unavailable in the classroom. (DA)

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SCHOOL CAMPING? WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

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How Did It Come About?

School camping burst onto the American educational scene in the 1940's. Although some students connect the present movement with earlier programs, such as a summer camp conducted by the Gunnery School in the 1860's, or a specialized summer camp which the Atlanta Public Schools operated at Hard Labor Creek, or programs in Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas and New York, it is difficult to document an organic relationship between them. It is assumed here that there was no such relationship.

A definite, clear-cut connection may be demonstrated between present day school camping programs and two institutions: The Clear Lake Camp in Michigan and Life-National Camps in New Jersey. Much of the early theory in the field emanated from L. B. Sharp and others associated with the New Jersey institutions. Current practices tend much more closely to follow precedents established in the Clear Lake program. (It should be pointed out that what is usually referred to as the "Clear Lake program" actually began at the St. Mary's Lake Camp, one of three camps -- including Clear Lake -- which were owned by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.)

It may not be assumed that the early programs in New Jersey and Michigan operated in ignorance of each other - or in competition with each other. There actually were many inter-relationships. Teachers from Michigan studied in the summer sessions at National Camp. Two former National Camp students were key personnel in the staff assembled at the St. Mary's Camp in 1945. L. B. Sharp led a consulting team of National Camp personnel, plus the writer, in a workshop conducted at Clear Lake Camp in 1944.

As new programs began to develop, both institutions served as sources of experienced personnel.[1] Programs begun in Texas, California and Illinois, especially, trace directly back to the Michigan influence.

Paralleling the development of school camping at the Clear Lake Camp -- and greatly influencing it -- was an active promotion sponsored jointly by Michigan's Department of Public Instruction and State Conservation Department. Julian W. Smith headed up the cooperative project which eventuated in the establishment of numerous local school camps. More importantly, it focused the nation's attention on Michigan as a groundbreaker in this new medium.

The 1950's saw great expansion, touching -- in one fashion or another--- practically every state in the nation. The same period witnessed some fundamental shifts of emphasis, to be detailed in another section of this monograph.

During the 60's outdoor education generally and school camping, in particular, have experienced remarkable growth. It is reliably estimated that 1,000 school districts, involving some half million students, were carrying on

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[1]See Smith, Julian W. et al, Outdoor Education, pp. 97-103 for fuller historical treatment.

school camping programs in 1966.[2] Titles III and V of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have encouraged some fifty new programs. Some of these are especially noteworthy because they touch metropolitan and inner-city youngsters for the first time.

It appears that camping has won a place in American education in a little over twenty years.

Why School Camping?

Education in and for the outdoors, of which school camping is an important segment, came about because of the the many twentieth century forces which tend to separate man from nature.

The machine age, industrialization, automation. specialization of vocation, and urbanization all push man away from the land. More important, for present purposes, these same tendencies have made for artificiality and restriction in the processes by which man rears his young. Most youngsters are growing up in an environment which positively prohibits their learning one of their most vital relationships; man to nature.

It is postulated by outdoor education enthusiasts that experience "where nature is" best suited to provide this understanding for today's children. Further, the proponents of school camping hold that actually living in natural settings is the much preferred method for accomplishing this same end.

But, even the early school camps envisioned broader purposes, largely social, which could well - possibly best -- be achieved in a camp setting. As early as the experimental period which preceded the Clear Lake venture, the Kellogg Foundation's aims included, in addition to "Nature":

Social Living
Healthful Living
Recreational Living
Work Experience.

More recent statements, gathered from over the nation, suggest the same aims are projected by modern day school camping programs.[3]

In sum, it may be said that societal factors caused education to look to a different kind of institution to accomplish some of their objectives and -- in the process -- discovered that this institution, the children's camp, had additional potential.

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[2]Smith, Julian W. "A Decade of Progress in Outdoor Education," Journal of Outdoor Education 1:1 pp 3-5.

[3]Smith, Julian W. et al, Outdoor Education. pp. 28-29.

What Do Children Do?

The early school camps in America owed a great deal to the Progressive Education movement. If they had had a motto, it most surely would have been Dewey's "Experience teaches" or Kilpatrick's "We learn what we live; we live what we learn." These early camps were viewed as children's communities in which children were producers, consumers, citizens, planners, and doers.

It was during this period that the writer characterized the ideal school camp:

> "It's a permissive community;
> Reality is the camp's forte;
> Camp is a planning community;
> Camp is a warmly human community;
> It's an experimenting, exploring, discovering community;
> Everyone works in camp;
> Camp is a boy-girl community;
> Camp is a simple, child-sized place;
> Camp is a leisurely place;
> Camp is a close-to-nature community;
> Camp is fun." [4]

One early descriptive account[5] lists as program activities, among others: setting tables, making beds, electing store keepers, bankers, and postal clerks, "planning for the week," boating (so that they could safely go fishing later), planning for a cookout, cooking, exploring a pond community, visiting an abandoned farm, gathering native materials for use in the craft shop, cruising timber, felling trees for firewood, repairing a shelter, visiting a farm woodlot, studying "survival rate: of trees planted by other children, repairing trails, visiting a bird sanctuary, thinning brush, and setting up a weather station. (Note the large percentage of these activities which were "community jobs" -- things that needed to be done so that the community was a good and improving place to live. Note also, the lack of distinction between "recreational" and "educational" activities.)

It might be said that the philosophy of these early school camps was holistic and activity centered, that academic disciplines were brought to bear when they were needed to solve problems. Science -- or arithmetic -- were seldom mentioned as such, although much used.

While an examination of daily programs of school camps in the late 1960's would surely turn up many instances of the activity approach, the observer would also note such program items as "Arithmetic in the Outdoors" or

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[4]Donaldson, George W., "A Camp Director Looks at His Program," Journal of Educational Sociology, May 1950. pp. 529-532.

[5]Donaldson, George W., and Leslie S. Clark, "Two Weeks of School in the Woods," National Elementary Principal, Feb., 1949. pp. 11-15.

"Historical Exploration." Indeed, in one case, the entire week in school camp is organized around school subjects:

Monday - Arithmetic
Tuesday - Language
Wednesday - Science, etc.

Another reflection of the tendency toward making school camping more academic may be seen in the organization of recent books. Two of four books in the area of outdoor education published since 1965 are organized (chaptered) by academic disciplines.

The thrust of the entire field of outdoor education, including school camping, toward the academic is probably accounted for by the general educational panic which followed Sputnik. Or, it may be simply a reflection of the same urge which originally caused man to build subject-matter compartments. Regardless of its origin the trend is well established. Indeed, one educator has been heard to remark, "School camps have become simply bases from which children are taken on a series of field trips - which might as well be school-based!"

Fortunately, the methodology of direct experience, of discovery, of exploration, and of adventuring is residual. Youngsters in school camps are still active, they do things, they use their senses to learn, and they are freer than in almost any other educational institution.

It is to be hoped that the educational pendulum will swing back to the holistic side. History suggests that it will.

How Does a School Secure a Camp?

Most American schools do not own camp facilities. Suprisingly, schools have experienced a minimum of difficulty in securing the use of children's camps.

Relatively few school boards have actually purchased existing camps or purchased land and built their own. Jefferson County, Colorado, is a notable exception. The school board there bought some 500 acres containing minimum improvements, and is retiring its debt from fees paid by children. In Tyler, Texas, a non-profit community corporation has built a camp for lease to the city schools. Cases such as these are the exceptions. The general practice is to lease a camp from an organization which carries on a summer and/or weekend camping program or from a governmental agency which has such a facility to lease.

A recent study[6] outlines the sources from which schools have been able to secure camp facilities as follows:

"Public
School Boards
Agencies of Local Government
Agencies of State Government, including Colleges and Universities
Agencies of Federal Government."

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[6]Donaldson, George W., "How Schools Secure Camps," Journal of Outdoor Education, 1:1 pp. 9-15.

"Private
Churches
Private Colleges and Universities
Private Owners
Foundations."

A rich variety of cooperative arrangements by which school boards secure the use of leased camps has grown up. Foremost among them are:

1. Owner furnishes just facilities;
2. Owner furnishes facilities and provides maintenance;
3. Owner furnishes facilities and provides food service;
4. Owner provides facilities and provides certain program assistance.

Various combinations of the above are, obviously, possible. It is generally considered sound policy for the school board to pay, from tax funds, for the facilities used in school camping programs just as it provides other educational plants.

How Is School Camping Financed?

Lest school camping be conceived as something special, an extra, or a frill, it is the judgment of most outdoor educators that the principles of school finance applied to any other facet of education in a democracy be applied here. If school camping programs are to be integral parts of the operation of American school systems, no other course can be justified.

Yet, there are some schools which insist that their camping program be self-supporting. In some of these communities the schools operate -- in effect - a private camp program on school time. Children whose parents can afford to pay the fee, attend: others do not. Such practices, in addition to running counter to the entire course of American education, tend to defeat the very purposes of school camping itself. They cannot be justified and should not be tolerated.

A justifiable pattern of financing school camping would see the board of education pay for:

1. Facilities and equipment
2. Instruction
3. Transportation
4. Health services.

In this scheme, parents would pay only for the child's food. And, in some instances, funds for feeding indigent children would have to be provided from outside sources.

A moot point is the matter of personal insurance for the children. In many school systems a comprehensive medical insurance policy covers children in all school-sponsored activities, including camping. Other systems insist that children attending camp furnish proof of insurance or buy special insurance for the camp period. In still other instances, school boards have assumed, with con-

siderable justification, that a school camp should be at least as safe and healthy as a school and that no special insurance is needed. Unfortunately, no studies are available to provide normative data on the problem on insurance.

How Is School Camping Planned?

Instructional programs in the school camps have been roughly fitted into two categories which, while not discrete, are helpful. They are:

1. The camp-centered program, and
2. The school centered program.[7]

It is strange indeed that schools should ever have embarked upon a "camp-centered" program. But some of them did. In most instances this was done because of the perfectly natural inclination of "camp people" in the schools (teachers who had attended or worked in private or agency camps) to take the lead in communities which were initiating programs. In too many instances, these well-meaning and enthusiastic people simply imposed the program they knew - and hence were comfortable with -- upon the school. In some cases, about the only observable differences between a school campd and - say - a Girl Scout camp was that there were boys around! This is, surely, not to say that agency camping programs are not good. They are. But, it <u>is</u> to say that what the character-building agencies do with children in camps is not what the schools are uniquely fitted to do.

So, it would seem obvious that the business of schools in camps could precisely be defined as that of operating a "school-Centered program.

"The only justification for schools offering camping experiences to their youngsters lies in the fact that the outdoors offers educational opportunities not found in the classroom.

"It follows, then, that the activities in which children engage in a school camp should be directly related to the school experiences of these same children .....

"Educationally, there is no difference in a teacher and children leaving the classroom to go to the school's library or science center -- where experiences not afforded by the classroom can be had -- and in their going to the outdoor laboratory, the camp. There is no more reason for taking a group of children into the outdoors when they have no specific purposes of their own for going than there is for taking a class to the library just because the school happens to have one![8]

In the same delineation of the "outdoor laboratory concept of school camping" the following set of principles was proposed as a basis for the relationship between the classroom curriculum and the camp experience:

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[7]Brimm, R. P., "What Are the Issues in Camping and Outdoor Education? Camp-centered? School Centered?", <u>Camping Magazine</u>, Jan., 1959. pp. 14-15.

[8]Donaldson, George W., and Hope A Lambert, "School Camp -- Outdoor Laboratory for Enriched Learning Experiences," <u>Camping Magazine</u>, May, 1956. p.17.

"1. The school camp is best conceived as the laboratory where teachers and children go to learn about those aspects of the outdoors which cannot be learned in the classroom.

"2. An intimate relationship must be maintained between the classroom's aims and subject matter and the experiences offered by camp.

"3. Teachers and children will need help from the camp staff in planning for their camp session. Such help should take the form of consultation rather than dictation, because the camp exists to help teacher and children meet <u>their</u> objectives.

"4. The objective of cooperative pre-camp planning should be that of a hand-tailored program for each class, precisely fitted to their educational experiences, needs and aims."[9]

Thus it will be seen that there is no one good set of experiences for all children in a school camp. Its program must be school-centered. Within the pattern of school-centered planning, American education should continue to develop the unique contributions of cooperative outdoor living. This is the only justification schools have for running children's camps.

What's It Like Today?

Hundreds of thousands of American children go to school camps on school time every year. And, although practices vary a great deal from one school district to another, certain fairly typical practices may be detected:

1. School camps are frequently located at some distance from the schools they serve. Transportation, usually by school bus, is provided by the school.

2. The school camp facility is typically a summer camp which may or may not have been somewhat rebuilt or winterized for school use. Many schools schedule camp sessions in early fall and late spring so that facilities will not require winterizing.

3. The typical school camp session is five days in length. Some schools hold briefer sessions; almost none hold longer ones.

4. Teacher and children attend as a class unit. The role of the classroom teacher varies a great deal from system to system. But, almost without exception, schools have insisted upon maintaining the integrity of the classroom by keeping the teacher and children together.

5. The teacher has help. While the amount and kind of help varies greatly it has never been assumed in America, as it has in similar European programs, that teachers should do the job alone. Help available ranges from a complete camp staff through "consultants," high school and college helpers, to interested parents. In some instances, resource agencies provide visiting specialists to assist in program activities (e.g. a forester, a soil conservationist.)

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[9] op. cit., pp. 17-18.

7. Better educated personnel is available to staff school camps. A number of colleges and universities prepare teachers to work with children outdoors.

8. Increasingly, help is available to schools wishing to begin school camping or to improve existing programs. Several states make available the services of expert personnel from their state education departments. Federal, state, and local resource agencies have generally been most helpful. Private conservation agencies are demonstrating increasing interest. A number of experienced consultants are also available.

In the fine American tradition of local initiative and control, schools have developed a rich variety of practices in school camping. Now, with encouragement from federal and state levels and almost universally enthusiastic acceptance from children and parents, school camping should experience still another forward thrust.

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